

have more than one right answer and don't expect them to see things the way you see them. Show your children not only that you care about their progress and performance but also that you have confidence in their ability. Your confidence will be reflected in their performance and will reinforce their confidence in themselves.

The Parent and the School

The special role that parents play does not end when the child begins his/her formal education. Parents remain the single most powerful influence throughout the child's school years. The best way to show your children that you care about their progress at school is to take an interest in their work and efforts. (Show them that you are genuinely interested in their work, not just in the results they get; parents who only show interest on report-card day do not present a strong argument for the value of education.) Discuss your children's work with them and help them with their school work.

Your interest should extend to the school and the activities taking place there. Attend parent-teacher meetings and take part in special projects whenever possible. Your positive attitude towards the school and its work will reflect your general belief in the value of education. If your children get the impression that you never have time for the school, that you are too busy to share and take part in their learning, they will gradually come to believe that school and learning aren't all that important. A recent study revealed that the children who do well are those whose parents are the most interested in their education.

Finally, *caring* and *sharing* are the parent's most important contributions. If you care enough to provide experiences that are good learning opportunities and an atmosphere that inspires your children to make their best effort, you are giving them the support they need for learning.

For specific tips as to how you can help your children learn and improve their performance at school, see *Parents as Teachers, Part 2: Practical Suggestions*.

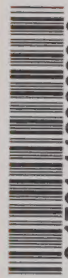
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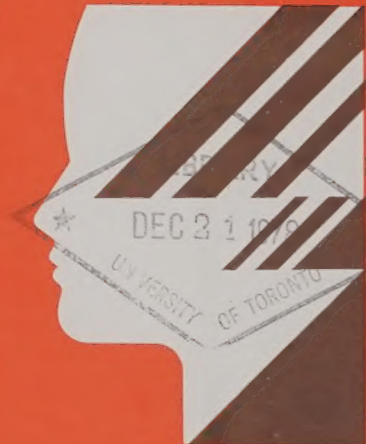
Thomas L. Wells
Minister

Helping Your Child Learn, Part 1: What You Should Know About the Learning Process

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The Special Role of the Parent

Not so long ago "education" was thought of as the formal learning process that begins when the child reaches the age of six and first attends school. Now parents are recognized as the first and most significant teachers of their children; the education that children receive in the home during the first six years of life sets the pattern of their future development.

This discovery will prompt the concerned parent to ask: *What should I be doing that I haven't been doing? Am I doing anything that I shouldn't be doing?* Most parents are aware of their role and influence and do a pretty good job of preparing their children for school – and life – without the benefit of special training.

Children are led easily into the learning process by their natural curiosity. By stimulating this curiosity, the parent can maintain or increase the child's interest in a wide variety of learning situations.

It is important to remember that no two children are alike; what excites the interest of one child may leave another child indifferent. By the same token, many children react automatically to what goes on around them while others will need their parents' help to keep their interest alive.

Children and adults can be very much alike. If we are pushed too far, we succumb to stress and anxiety; if we are not urged to try and do better, we may fail to reach our full potential. Always set goals that are just within the child's grasp. Challenge your children to reach for something that they know they can attain if they try. If the goal is out of sight, the child will be discouraged and may lose interest.

Competition

Most children have a natural urge to compete and usually enjoy competing if they think they will be successful. The emphasis should be on the *degree of challenge*. If the child is allowed to compete in a situation in which he/she has little or no chance of succeeding, then the exercise is pointless; if, on the other hand, the child competes in a situation in which success is possible, the challenge becomes a positive experience that fosters the child's confidence.

Although competition is good for most children, *the child who fears competition should never be pushed to compete*. A child who has experienced success and who has confidence in his/her achievements, will be able to withstand failure. On the other hand, the child who is insecure and whose self-esteem is vulnerable can be hurt by failing in a competitive situation.

Regardless of how your children react to competitive situations, you should always discourage competition within the family. All children want to explore their environment, but do so in different ways and at their own pace. Respect each child's individuality, encourage his/her particular abilities, and avoid comparisons among brothers and sisters and among classmates.

The Child and You

Perhaps the most important role of the parent is to be a model of what he/she would like the child to be. Children reflect their parents' attitudes from an early age. Take the parents' attitude to learning, for instance. If the parents show the child that they are interested in learning, they will encourage the child to learn.

If you want your children to show an interest in something, you must show them that it is also interesting and enjoyable for you. If you would like your children to read, let them see that you read a lot, and that you enjoy it – and read to them often. The same applies to writing; show them that you enjoy writing and that it is a necessary skill. If you would like them to appreciate music, listen to it at home and give them opportunities to enjoy and share it with you.

It is extremely important that you set a sound example in your habits from the very beginning. Discipline, cleanliness, orderliness, thoroughness, and perseverance are some of the qualities that your children can pick up from you and that will assist them at school.

How Your Child Learns

Keep in mind that learning need not be a formal, structured affair. The simplest situation presents opportunities for learning if you are alert and willing to recognize them. The child's natural curiosity is most often your clue and starting point. As you rake the leaves in your backyard, for instance, your child's questions may lead you to questions about natural science, the changing seasons, and an appreciation of autumn colours. At the same time, you are given an opportunity to broaden the child's vocabulary by introducing new words.

There are three important points to remember in every learning situation:

1. *Children must start with the familiar and move to the unfamiliar.* When you introduce the child to a new idea or experience, you must make sure that he/she has some understanding of the subject. In other words, a good learning experience is one in which something novel is added to something familiar. If the experience or idea is totally new, the child may reject it because he/she cannot relate it to something he/she already understands.
2. *Children start with a small idea and build on it as they go along.* Often when a child asks a question on a complex topic, we either try to avoid answering altogether because we feel the child is too young to understand or we give a lengthy, complicated answer that leaves him/her confused and unsatisfied. What we should do is answer in the simplest possible way.
3. *Learning is most effective when the child sees the necessity for the task.* Learning how to spell a word, for instance, can be a meaningless chore or a meaningful discovery.

In addition to taking advantage of the learning potential of the ordinary situation, the parent must ensure that the child is exposed to as wide a variety of experiences as possible. When on a trip to the country, the library, the shopping plaza, the museum, or the fire hall, encourage your children to use all their senses. In recollecting their experiences, talk about not just what they saw, but what they heard, smelt, and felt. These discussions can be marvellous opportunities for developing language and for encouraging children's creativity and individuality. Ask your children questions that